

The North-Eastern Naturalist

Issue 186: JULY 2013

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IT IS THE MISSION OF THIS CLUB to encourage the study, appreciation and preservation of our natural and cultural environment, the animals, plants, geology and landforms, including those of the coastal and marine areas in the North East region of Tasmania.

The Club conducts outings on the second Saturday of the month.

JULY 13

A ROCKY RAMBLE : MT. CAMERON.

A short walk from the Mt. Cameron Field Study Centre to a viewpoint partway up the Wedgetail Peak Track, about 3km return, steep in places. If the rocks are dry we may go further. Bring a thermos and eats for afternoon tea at the FSC after the walk. Meet 10am. At the signposted junction of Waterhouse and Old Port Roads, 11km from Gladstone. Leader: Mike Douglas 63 561 243.

AUGUST 10

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING : 20 EDWARD STREET, BRIDPORT.

This is our one big social event of the year—not what you'd expect of an AGM. Its our big chance to catch up with members who, for one reason or another, we don't see very often. The meeting begins at 11am, then a shared lunch which all contribute to, then an item of entertainment— yet to be arranged.

SEPTEMBER 14

HARRIDGE FALLS.

Short 1km. track to falls steep and through forest, but not dangerous if we take it slowly. We need to car pool at Weldborough, as parking near falls is limited. Longer walk after lunch a possibility. Meet at Weldborough Pub 10am. Leader: Lesley Nicklason 0400557418 or 63736195

OCTOBER 11 - 13.

FEDERATION OF FIELD NATS. GET-TOGETHER: PORT SORELL .

Everyone is invited to a weekend of interesting activities and field trips hosted by the Central North Field Naturalist Club. Because this is a favourite of many of our members, it will replace the normal club outing. Closing date for bookings— Tuesday 1st October. Look for details over page.

NOVEMBER 9

LALLA : RHODODENDRUM RESERVE AND BEYOND.

This superb Rhodo. Garden is at its best this month—but beyond the planted lies the natural bush which we will explore with Sue. Turn into Lalla Road in Lilydale and the gardens are signposted at about 2.5km on the left. There will be a charge of \$8 and \$5 [concession] Contact: Sue Wilson ph. 044 843 5012

DECEMBER 14.

CASCADE DAM - CASCADE RIVER.

Which route we take has to be decided; there are two possibilities. Meet at the caravan park on the riverfront 10am. More info by email. Leader: Louise Brooker. Ph. 0417 149 244

From the Editor

It's very rare that we would cancel an outing, but in the last twelve months we've been thwarted on two occasions. The first was when we had to change plans after we found a boom gate across the road to Mt. Maurice. We still had a good walk though. In April, the weather was so foul that no-one even entertained the thought of going on Mike's proposed Sky Walk. It was cancelled because of possible danger to members. Of course, this walk will appear on the calendar another time, but it has prompted me to make a note that the cancellation of an outing would be done by the leader if weather is so extreme as to be dangerous. **If members are in doubt, they should contact the leader or the president or secretary.**

Soon, the newsletter will go onto our website and be available as a PDF document. We have negated the need for a password to access this and it is my intention to ask members at the AGM to indicate their preference.

Federation of Field Nats. Weekend Get-together 11-13th October.

Accommodation and home base: Camp Banksia, corner of Pitcairn and Anderson Streets, Port Sorell.

- Bunk room accommodation—\$26 per person per night.
- Camping \$20 per person per night.
- Bring own towels and bedding including pillows.

Cooking: in small shared kitchen.

- Saucepans, crockery and cutlery provided
- Inside and outside barbeques available
- Inside or outside seating for meals

Meeting room:

- Chairs, tables, heating.
- Tea and coffee making facilities.

R.S.V.P. By Tuesday 1 October
Robin Garnett,
Email: robin@rubicon.org.au or
Phone: 0438 002 615

Programme:

Friday 11th 4pm onwards,
evening BYO barbeque
Field Nats quiz: a challenge between field Nat. Groups.

Saturday 12th

Morning: Visit Phil Collier and Robin Garnett's conservation property, Rubicon Sanctuary, 241 Parkers Ford Road, Port Sorell.

Afternoon: Visit Hawley Reserve.

Evening: Indian Banquet [\$20 per person] at Camp Banksia. Then talk by Phil Collier: Threatened Plant Species in the Port Sorell area.

Sunday 13th:

Morning: survey *Thelymitra antennifera* population at Narawntapu National Park
Lunch: BYO picnic at Narawntapu.

Vale—John Simmons OAM—23 November 2012.

John Simmons was a member of the Launceston Field Naturalist Club for 40+ years. He was a well respected, dedicated naturalist. In the late 1970's after the club had been bequeathed the Skemps property by the late John Skemp, John proposed the publishing of a book to raise funds for a Field Centre to be constructed at the site and this was built in the 1980's and opened in 1989. The book was *The Field Guide to Flowers and Plants of Tasmania*, which has been like a bible for many of us. It has been so popular, it has had four major revisions, the latest in 2007 when John replaced many photographs and revised some botanical information.

John and Marion did everything together, including have an Acacia named after them—*A. simmonsiana*. They travelled extensively both collecting and photographing Acacias and discovered many rare and unusual Acacias as well as working on many environmental projects around the country.

Our condolences to Marion [if a little late] and a salute to a truly remarkable couple.

Into the Wild—Wilderness Photography in Tasmania

An exhibition of interest at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Royal Park, Launceston is halfway through a year of showing. Featuring stories and photographs by such iconic photographers as Truchanis, Dombrovskis, Blakers and Bell as well as Thwaites, Smithies and Allport, the exhibition highlights their talent and the impact they have made from early times on the conservation movement and tourism promotion.

The images are strongly evocative and will serve to give an appreciation of our landscape and those who have documented it. Well worth a visit. Exhibition closes 16th February 2014.

North East Bioregional Network

One of the items of interest in this group's newsletter, concerned a Development Application for the Fingal Coal Mine. The NEBN were the only objectors to the Application which proposes to export 1,000,000 tonnes of coal per year to the Philippines. The group were able to get some conditions changed, but it needed considerable resources to take the matter any further.

It was also reported that the now defunct Scotia Mine near Gladstone, as part of its rehabilitation process, will release 1,000 megalitres of contaminated water from a tailings dam into the Ringarooma River.

BLACK CREEK POOLS AND DERBY TUNNEL

It's amazing how many people turn up to an outing that's advertised as "low key, minimal impact, leisurely". It was February though, and maybe that's exactly what people required after the hectic time of Christmas and New Year. The little-known pools on Black Creek were a pleasant surprise. We had a long leisurely lunch; some explored further up the creek, then the group divided: those who went home, and those who went off to explore the Derby Tunnel.

Two things were of interest in the Derby Tunnel. Cut through solid granite, this 1200ft. long tunnel, just above the Cascade River, remains from the very early 1880's when it was constructed by the Briseis Tin Company. Helen was a 'mine' of information as she read from Google to inform us.

Pam writes this....

Equipped with a few tiny torches, some of them needing constant winding or clicking [accompanied by much hilarity], we made our stooped and somewhat apprehensive way into the tunnel. As the light at either end faded and our eyes became accustomed to the dark, we flashed our torches onto the rock above us and were delighted to find tiny lights seemingly embedded in the surface. Glow-worms !! From each site hung several gossamer-like threads.

These glow-worms, *Arachnocampa tasmaniensis*, are the larvae of a fly from the family Keroplatidae, their closest relatives being fungus flies that lay their eggs in mushrooms to provide food for the larvae. Glow-worms, however, are carnivorous and rely on bioluminescence to attract their prey. They are not very mobile and produce long threads decorated at intervals with sticky droplets which entrap flies.

The larva builds a structure composed of a horizontal mucous tube suspended by this network of threads from the rock and moves backwards and forwards in the tube, able to turn in its own length, as it maintains its "snare". Bioluminescence is produced by internal cells located in a swelling of the posterior of the larva. The blue/green light is visible through the transparent cuticle. The fly is attracted by the light, becomes trapped in the sticky droplet and is then "hauled up" by the larva to be eaten.

The larval stage lasts many months, going through 4 moults and finally forming a pupa that lasts about a week before emerging as the adult fly. These flies look like large mosquitoes with very long legs. They are sluggish and rest on the walls of the cave, surviving only a few days, not feeding. Males will find a female pupa, wait for her to emerge and then mate. She lays 130 eggs which hatch in 7 to 9 days and so begins the dark cycle again.

Source: Google : Australian Glow-worms in Caves, an article written by David Merritt and Claire Baker of School of Life Sciences, Uni. of Queensland

Luckily, we were **looking** for the cave spider, for if we had been unaware of its presence, it could be frightening to become tangled in their web, because one's head is not far from the roof of the tunnel. One web was particularly extensive: a fine horizontal sheet attracting millions of miniscule water droplets and glistening in the light of our torches. One web observed in a small narrow cave at Mole Creek measured 122cm. long and 61 cm. wide. The one we saw didn't come close to that, but it would have been half that size.

The female spider is about 19mm in body length. The carapace is reddish brown and the abdomen dull brown to almost black without any distinct pattern. The legs are very long and thin, the first pair being about four times the length of the length of the body, an impressive 18cms. The

The cave spider is widely distributed throughout Tasmania; it's not confined to caves, as we know them, but may be found in hollow logs, tree stumps, mine shafts, indeed any cool dark cavity that is large enough for it to make its extensive web. It is even found in the rock overhangs at Cuckoo Falls. Cave spiders are the biggest spider in Tasmania.



They are a top-level predator and maintain a stronghold around the entrance zones to caves and tunnels. They are being studied as an indicator species to track the effects of habitat degradation and recreational caving activities. Niall Doran, Honorary Research Associate at UTas, has published work on *H. Troglodytes* in the Journal of Insect Conservation.

the female except that the legs are relatively longer.

male is about 13mm. And resembles

The original specimens were found in the caves at Mole Creek in 1883, and they were placed in the suborder Hypochilina with relatives in Chile, among other places. After extensive taxonomic work on the family, culminating in 1958, the Tasmanian spider was placed in a new genus, which was called **Hickmania**, named to honour Professor V.V. Hickman who had a long career as Professor of Biology at the University of Tasmania. It's name is now *Hickmania troglodytes*.

A DAY WITH AUNTY PATSY.

It was a day we will all remember fondly. We are at Tomahawk. Patsy Cameron welcomes us to Leenteener country and river; she's campaigning for a name change. We are marked with the mix of ochre and welcomed to country and soon begin our wander through the plant-scape which Patsy knows so well now, but also remembers from her childhood growing up on Flinders Island.

Before we leave this spot though, we are introduced to "cunnygong", the natural aloe vera useful for burns and ant bites. It grows everywhere coastal—its pigface. "Don't throw the flower away 'cos the snakes will bite you". When the plant's in seed, squeeze the fruit for a feed.

We're wandering along the road now and are stopping every ten metres or so. The first plant we see is the native cranberry, *Astroloma humifusum*, with its green, fleshy, edible fruit was the favourite fruit of the now extinct Tasmanian Emu. Then there's *Diplarrena moraea* which we know as the white flag iris. It's known to aboriginal people as the snake lily— "when the flowers come out—watch out for snakes". A favourite plant for basket weaving, it "should definitely not be picked in October—it makes the rains come".

The species of native cherry here at Tomahawk is unusual— it is the Coastal Ballart, *Exocarpus syrticola*. The word 'ballart' is from a Victorian aboriginal word 'balad' or 'ballot'. The Latin *syrtus* means sand dune, and *cola* means dweller. Which refers to its coastal distribution. Related to *E. cupressiformis*, it's easy to imagine the fruit may be similar to taste, although a pink berry rather than red. In actual fact it only resembles a berry - it is actually a drupe and contains a single seed. Again, there's information in the name. *Exocarpus* - *exo*, greek, outside. *Carpos*, fruit. This means the seed is outside the fruit.

An interesting use for the seed pods of the *Acacia longifolia* was to fill the gut cavity of a roasting wallaby with them. This is the one wattle whose seeds were collected and ground. At other times the ripening pods were roasted and then the seeds picked out and eaten.

After an hour of wandering, we find we are on Leenteener Hill and we can see both hunting grounds stretched out before us. To seaward we see the womens' hunting grounds where all the abovementioned foods were gathered. Inland, on the planes of Waterhouse, the men kept the land clear with fire and hunted the native animals. We talk of many things sitting here. Of Mannalargenna whose clan land stretched between the Ringarooma and the Great Musselroe Rivers, of Woorady the aboriginal story teller, of Robinson's "friendly mission" and of the old town of Ducane now covered in sand-dunes on the other side of the river.

Back at our base, and after lunch, our dexterity is put to the test as we learn to make string. Patsy has a supply of a grass, *Schoenoplectus pungens*, she has treated with fire and water and as we learn the patterns required, there is a mixed air of fascination, concentration, and sometimes frustration.

Another walk, this time down by the river, where we learn about more wild plant food. We hear about the system for taking swan eggs which involves taking one, leaving one, or taking two leaving two and always some at the end for the swans to hatch. We try chewing on the white fleshy base of the coastal sword rush, *Lepidosperma gladiatum*. We sniff the stinking boronia, *Boronia anemonifolia* and try to imagine what it would be like sleeping with it under our pillows to cure our ailments.

This day was arranged by Jay with the support of NRM North. Thanks, Jay, you would have enjoyed it. Patsy Cameron touched our hearts. She is like us with her love of country. She is, in her gentle way, making changes to the way we think about the past, and hopefully, paving a way forward that results in a greater respect for our indigenous people.